

## Commissioner Comment –

The Madison County Law & Justice project has raised a great deal of interest throughout the area. As Commissioners we are very familiar with the needs addressed in the project, and because we are obligated to meet these needs, we have chosen not to get in the middle of all the comments pro or against, intending instead to educate and inform. Recently, we conducted 14 public hearings around the County for voters to ask questions about the project and to become better informed on the needs the county faces. Yet, time has come to be clear on just why Madison County has placed this project before you, the voters.

County employees and numerous persons from the public have been involved in many sessions over the last six years to determine what plan and facility would best serve the County's growing needs as well as meet those needs in future years. This first drew attention while updating the County capital improvement plan and then later specifically while working toward resolving the defined issues through a building plan. Throughout much of this activity, we continued to consider just why this project is important, recognizing our primary responsibility to you, the taxpayer, was in consideration of these issues facing our growing, changing County:

- Provide handicapped accessibility – as required by federal standards and codes, and in response to a recent lawsuit mandating we be proactive in helping persons access all aspects of county offices.
- Centralize county services – to provide convenience and ease of access to all departments without having to drive all over the town or the county.
- Provide for secure storage & expansion needs – offices and vaults are over flowing; records must have a secure, safe placement; space must allow for office and storage growth 30-40 years to the future.
- Law enforcement & detention facility – provide adequate and functional office, storage and safe work space for sheriff personnel; locate detention within our county to keep deputy staff working for your needs rather than for transporting prisoners.
- Office expansions – to allow more practical work space for improved production and future growth

Again, the above goals have continually been the very purpose of the project. Fortunately, the list is not longer. Unfortunately, change and construction have a price tag. That price tag will surely increase as time goes on. Further, as other possibilities are and have been considered, such as alternate sites, sizes, designs and so forth, so does that price tag change.

Most readers have observed a number of comments that express opinion of the plan. Some are in support; some are in opposition. Many of those against the project have used the press to emotionally express their concern for what we are proposing to build and why. Our intent has always been to present the project facts and allow residents to make an informed decision with these facts.

As stated earlier, we have been working on this issue for several years. We have assessed numerous sites in and around Virginia City. Convenience, efficiency and safety for you, the user, as well County employees, remain the greatest reasons for choosing a site near the current Court House. Central location in the county, water & sewer hookup supported by the Town of Virginia City, and the fact that the court house, county departments and jail have been here on main street for 130+ years are also realistic reasons.

Following the bond question that was defeated last year, we discussed the continued need for this project in publicized meetings weekly. We had heard concerns from persons regarding size,

number of detention beds, water & sewer availability, location, cost and appearance, as the most consistently voiced. In reviewing and revising the plan, we considered each of the above. Part of the top level has been removed in the current plan at a cost reduction of nearly \$300,000. Bed numbers were reduced from 35 in the first plan to 21 for another \$300,000 cost reduction. The plan does leave the outside structure in this area in tact because many persons were equally concerned that 21 beds would not be adequate in 20-30 years. The additional 14 beds could be added at some time in the future and was addressed as such in the above noted 14 meetings. Following concern that the water & sewer availability in Virginia City would not be adequate, we had an engineer evaluate the system for the Town's and our interests. That report concluded that both systems are sufficient. Location was not as great an issue in the earlier election as this year. Feeling this was the case, we chose to propose the project on the same site as earlier. Cost is always an issue. The fact is that the need remains and it will never get cheaper. Regarding appearance, every effort was made to support Virginia City's main street in a way that was appealing and would blend. We have had continual dialog with the Virginia City Historic Preservation Advisory Committee and the State Historic Preservation Office throughout this process.

You may have heard that the jail should be placed somewhere else in the County. This, too, was evaluated. Because the Sheriff's office, courts, Clerk of Court, County Attorney, Youth Probation, Emergency Management, detention and other offices have a regular interaction need, moving any part of this would complicate this interaction, efficiency, convenience, and safety, and cost you in the end. Several persons recently stated that if the jail was moved from the project, they would be in support. Were they unaware there has been a jail on the main street in Virginia City for 130+ years? By the way, the jail was built in 1876. This was long before state and federal regulations were in place that detention facilities are now required to meet. Because there is no extra space in the area of the jail, it can not be upgraded or retrofitted to serve today's requirements. (Should anyone question conditions in the jail, the Sheriff's office is willing to allow walk-through, if it is vacant – or check the Clerk of Court records for the lawsuits).

We recently heard that the public was not invited to participate in discussions regarding the Law & Justice project. To the contrary, there have been numerous noticed meetings during the last several years and more specifically since the last election. These discussions, as all meetings, are open to the public. Many residents from Virginia City and the County have participated in one or more of these meetings. We can not be responsible for someone not taking the initiative to be part of a process.

The last time Madison County took steps to expand was in 1964 when the 4 level addition was constructed on the back of the Court House. Over 40 years later, many changes have occurred throughout the County including numerous demands for service increases. Does this project answer all the questions on each end of the spectrum in hopes of lasting another 40 years? We live with them every day. Further, we attempt to educate and inform with the responsibility and confidence you have entrusted in us. Now you get to decide.